



## Introduction.

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## Chapter 1. Introduction

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This book addresses some of the key questions that scientists have been asking themselves for centuries: what is knowledge? What is information? How do we know that we know something? How do we construct meaning from the perceptions of things? And how do we communicate this meaning to others—that is to say, inform them? Although no consensus exists on a common definition of the concepts of information and communication, few can reject the hypothesis that information – whether perceived as an « object » or as a « process » - is a precondition for knowledge. Epistemology can be defined as the study of how we know things in general—this is its primary signification in the anglophone world—or, more specifically, as the study of how scientific knowledge is attained and validated—this is how it is conceived in the francophone world. To adopt an epistemological stance is to commit oneself to render an account of what constitutes knowledge or, in procedural terms, to render an account of when one can claim to know something. An epistemological theory imposes constraints on the interpretation of human cognitive interaction with the world. It goes without saying that different epistemological theories will have more or less restrictive criteria for distinguishing what constitutes knowledge from what is not. If information is a precondition for knowledge acquisition, giving an account of how knowledge is acquired should affect our understanding of information and communication as concepts.

While much has been written on the definition of these concepts, relatively few researchers have sought to establish explicit links between differing theoretical conceptions of them and the underlying epistemological stances. This is what this volume attempts to do. The idea for this book came about as the result of a project funded by the French Institute of Information and Communication Sciences on the epistemology of information and communication and how it affects interdisciplinarity in scientific research. A colloquium was organised within the framework of this project on the 8th April 2011 in Lyon<sup>1</sup> which gathered some of the leading specialists on the topic. The current book is a follow-up to the 2011 colloquium. It is a multidisciplinary exploration of how information and communication are perceived in different disciplines and how this affects theories of knowledge. As editors of the volume, we have endeavored to elicit viewpoints from a wide spectrum of disciplines and thus offer readers a diverse but complementary set of studies covering a wide range of theories of information, communication, and knowledge. We hope that the diversity of background of the authors makes for a rich dialogue and so contributes to readers' comprehension, and appreciation, of these fundamental phenomena.

The rest of the Introduction at <http://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-94-007-6973-1/page/1>

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<sup>1</sup> See EPICIC's colloquium website for more details at <http://www.epicic.org/en/node/16>.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://www.iscc.cnrs.fr/>

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